

Report on Progress in the Hartford Public Schools

June 1, 2005

Past, Present and Future

The formal eight-year relationship between the Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE) and the Hartford Public Schools is scheduled to end in December 2005. We must look critically at the successes, recognize the failures and then commit to finding new, more effective ways to work together.

There are areas in which we have seen positive movement – community involvement and support, leadership and governance, curriculum and instruction, magnet schools and student achievement in a few of the schools throughout Hartford. **But, if the bottom line is improvement in student achievement for *all* of Hartford’s students – and it must be – then we simply haven’t seen enough.**

This is why we propose that the SDE-Hartford relationship make a transition to a more intense focus on critical elements we know will improve the achievement of Hartford students however they come to school – poor, speaking a language other than English, with disabilities, below grade level for *any* reason, or gifted and talented. It will take time to create preschool opportunities for every 3- and 4-year-old and have the effects of this positive start take hold. It must not take years to turn around the academic performance of older students who never had that chance. The profiles of achievement in some of the Hartford schools – Breakthrough, Dwight, Greater Hartford Classical, Hartford Magnet Middle, Kennelly, Parkville, Rawson, Simpson-Waverly, Sport and Medical Sciences, Webster and Wish – for certain subject areas and certain grade levels show dramatic and sustained improvement in student achievement. Let’s work in partnership to learn what specific steps have worked in these schools and translate them into success in *all* Hartford schools, while working together to put in place the longer-term solutions such as providing high-quality pre-school for all 3- and 4-year-olds in Hartford.

This is where we say, “We have seen some progress, but we need to see more – faster. Enough is enough. We need to change this now.”

Areas of Positive Change

Community Involvement and Support

Over these years we have seen community involvement and support consistently increase in effective ways. Last year alone, business partnerships involved 63 companies, from local merchants to large corporations, with contributions valued at nearly \$10 million. Most contributions are in-kind (people, materials and equipment), and nearly one-quarter focus on tutoring Hartford youngsters. Areas of emphasis include literacy, math skills and, at the high school level, career development.

Parents and community members pay increasing attention to what is happening in the city's schools and are increasingly involved in their activities. The community's interactions with the central office and the board have sometimes included disagreements, but the focus of all involved has always been on what is best for students. Hartford voters approved the new charter that, among other changes in city governance, will establish the new Hartford Board of Education structure in December 2005.

Leadership and Governance

Leadership and governance in the Hartford Public Schools have made strides. Under the new Hartford Board of Education, part elected and part appointed, there have been some difficult times related to the tension between an appropriate focus on policy and leadership versus an inappropriate focus on management of departments and programs. Very recently, there has been a shift in understanding by the board that it needs to focus on policy and leadership, leaving management to the superintendent and the central office staff. This means that the board should focus on data-driven policymaking and should expect and receive the data it needs. In this context, the accuracy of data becomes critical. As part of the re-energized partnership this report envisions, the State Department of Education will help the Hartford school system ensure the accuracy and best use of its data as the foundation for sound decision making.

The board has established evaluation criteria for the superintendent, based on improvement trends in student outcomes, which is an appropriate way to determine the current health of the district as well as the superintendent's future as leader of the Hartford Public Schools. As part of the new partnership, the State Department of Education should actively work with the Hartford Board of Education to ensure that the evaluation criteria are reasonable and challenging given the current profile of students, the need for *radical* improvement to close the achievement gaps, and the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

Curriculum and Instruction

In a key step toward improving curriculum and instruction, Hartford has ensured that all elementary and middle schools have gone through the accrediting process conducted under the auspices of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Eight years ago, none of Hartford's elementary and middle schools were accredited. This process has provided each school the opportunity to come together with the assistance of a skilled NEASC team to determine the current status of teaching and learning, leadership, community involvement, and resources in their school – an important first step to improvement.

Hartford has written curriculum guides across all schools for all subject areas from prekindergarten through Grade 8 in an effort to systematize curriculum and professional development. There is an intense focus on literacy improvement. At the elementary level, each student has an uninterrupted, 90-minute literacy block in the morning and an additional 75-minute literacy block in the afternoon.

Success for All or Direct Instruction (reading programs) have been implemented in every elementary school, and ongoing professional development has been provided for all teachers. In

addition, the number of reading teachers in the Hartford schools increased to 60 in 2003-04 from 9.5 in 1997-98. These specialists provide intervention for struggling readers and model and coach best practices for classroom teachers.

Magnet Schools

The number of Hartford host magnet schools has gone from zero in 1997 to eight in 2004-05: Breakthrough, Greater Hartford Classical, Hartford Magnet Middle, Simpson-Waverly Classical Magnet, Pathways to Technology, Sport and Medical Sciences, University High School for Math and Science, and Webster MicroSociety. The Hartford Board of Education and Superintendent Robert Henry have established an ongoing plan to add two schools annually according to a set of themes, timeframes and construction schedules. By the beginning of the 2006-07 school year, there will be 12 magnet schools in Hartford. Results from the 2004 CMT and CAPT assessments are promising, with Hartford host magnets exceeding the ERG I and/or state averages in most subtests.

A Foundation

These areas of positive change are, at a minimum, what is needed to form the foundation necessary to aggressively address the shortcoming – student achievement – that must be the sole focus of our re-energized SDE-Hartford partnership. The positive change that has occurred in these areas is a good beginning, but it must continue if the foundation is to remain strong.

Areas in Need of Improvement

Student Achievement

Students in Connecticut's most economically disadvantaged communities (Education Reference Group or ERG I – Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Waterbury and Windham) are, as a group, the lowest-performing students in our state.

Students in ERG I consistently score well below the state average on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) in Grades 4, 6 and 8 and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) in Grade 10. For the most part, Hartford students score even lower than the ERG I averages. For example, on 13 measures on the 2004 CMT and CAPT (reading, writing and math in Grades 4, 6 and 8 and reading across the disciplines, writing, math and science in Grade 10), only 6 found Hartford's average percentage scoring at or above proficiency the same as or higher than those of ERG I. These were Grade 6 reading (same), Grade 6 writing (higher by 2 percentage points), Grade 6 math (by 1 point), Grade 8 writing (same), Grade 8 math (by 1 point) and Grade 10 writing (by 2 points). In addition, Hartford's aggregate scores never come close to the state average. The smallest difference on the 2004 CMT and CAPT was 16 points (Grade 6 writing); the largest was 41 points (Grade 10 science – 41 percent of Hartford students scored at or above proficient, while 82 percent of students statewide did). [Please see Attachments 1-13.]

Hartford students are beginning to close the achievement gaps with students in Connecticut's less disadvantaged districts. From 2000 to 2004, the achievement of Hartford regular education students who are not English language learners (ELL) increased at a faster rate than that of their counterparts in ERGs A-H in all subtests except Grade 6 mathematics. Some, although less, improvement is seen in Hartford student performance compared to that of students in other ERG I districts. From 2000 to 2004, the achievement of regular education, non-ELL students in Hartford increased at a rate faster than that of their counterparts in ERG I in just three of the nine subtests. [Please see Attachment 13a.]

National tests (the SAT and Advanced Placement or AP exams) show similar patterns. From 1998 to 2004, Hartford students' combined (verbal and math) SAT score increased by 18 points from 777 to 795. The percentage of students taking the test decreased by 4.6 points, from 65.8 percent to 61.2 percent. During the same period, the statewide combined score rose by 8 points from 1008 to 1016, while participation remained relatively stable at a much higher level (approximately 75 percent). While it is a good sign that Hartford students closed the gap in combined scores by 10 points (from 231 to 221), this increase in Hartford's scores is coupled with a troubling decrease in participation. Further, in absolute terms Hartford students still score well below the state average. [Please see Attachments 14 and 15.]

Between 1998 and 2004, the percentage of Hartford high school seniors who took an Advanced Placement test decreased from 10.2 percent to 9.7 percent, while statewide the percentage rose from 12.3 to 18.6 – clearly a discouraging change for Hartford and an unacceptable difference between Hartford and the state. It is critical that the district implement plans to offer the core AP courses (Biology, Calculus AB, English Language, English Literature and U.S. History) to students in each high school. Further, while the percentage of Hartford test-takers scoring 3 on a scale of 1-5 (3 considered a “passing” score) rose from 33.8 to 39.3 during these years, those percentages still lagged far behind the statewide figures of 70.6 percent in 1997-98 and 71.4 percent in 2003-04. [Please see Attachment 16.]

Rigorous Course Offerings

Honors courses, which often (although not always) lead students to take AP courses and exams, have experienced slight enrollment increases at all three of Hartford's traditional high schools from 2003-04 to 2004-05. At Bulkeley, the number rose from 280 to 299, while the percentage of the total student population remained roughly the same (18.8 and 18.6 percent, respectively). At Hartford Public, the increases were from 161 to 170 students and from 11.1 percent to 12.4 percent. At Weaver, 189 students enrolled in honors courses in 2003-04, while 211 are enrolled this year; the percentage rose from 15.5 to 16.7 percent. Hartford must continue to expand rigorous honors and AP opportunities at more aggressive rates.

A practice described by Hartford students needs to be reviewed by the administration: putting youngsters in regular classes and designating them as “honors” students. This practice is understandable given low honors class enrollments, but it will work only if teachers truly differentiate instruction and provide honors work to these students. According to student reports, this is not happening. It is incumbent upon administrators to monitor these courses to ensure that honors work is being offered to students who are so designated.

How Improvement Happens

All of these results show that most Hartford students simply are not learning what they need to know in order to succeed in school, college, career or life. It is not their fault. It is our responsibility to change what is happening – to replicate the achievements of Hartford’s most successful schools so that, soon, these results and more will show that all of the city’s students are learning all they need to know to build a strong foundation for the futures they deserve. The fact that some schools have broken from the pack counters the claim, made by both those who want to dismantle the system and those who want to excuse it, that under current conditions Hartford students and schools cannot succeed. We know that is false; now we need to understand and correct the factors that limit success to a small number of Hartford’s schools.

When we review achievement results of all schools across all grades and subject areas (2004 CMT and CAPT), it becomes clear that there are some schools that consistently perform better than other schools in Hartford. For example, students at the Hartford Magnet Middle School scored at or above the state average in 100 percent of the areas tested; at Simpson-Waverly, the figure was 50 percent; and Greater Hartford Classical Magnet, 50 percent.

It is equally important to look at schools that have not exceeded the state averages in all areas but have surpassed the ERG I averages and appear to be on their way to meeting or exceeding the state averages in many areas. The following schools scored above the ERG I averages in 100 percent of the areas tested: Dwight, Kennelly, Rawson and Sport and Medical Sciences Magnet. At Webster, the figure was 89 percent; Breakthrough Magnet, 80 percent; Burr, Naylor, Parkville Community and Wish, 67 percent.

These successes do not happen by accident. The SDE-Hartford partnership can work together to identify the factors that have led to improved student achievement at these schools, build upon and expand them there, and help Hartford’s other schools adopt and adapt their “secrets” in order to achieve the same kind of success – and more.

The state must work with Hartford to examine existing resources and find new ones to create and implement the programs that we know will help student achievement improve significantly. We need to look at outputs for all students (CMT, CAPT, SAT and AP scores) and the inputs that contribute to these results. Some of these inputs can be controlled by the district; some by the state; most can be affected to any significant degree only by joint, focused effort. These are described below.

Elements of Success

The eight key areas that are described below have been proven to contribute to improved student achievement. Addressing them effectively will improve student achievement in Hartford. No single element is the key, however, and there is no standard “recipe” for mixing these “ingredients” in order to be successful. Every school is unique, and increased student achievement may result from different sets of elements at different schools. The SDE-Hartford schools partnership will not seek a cookie-cutter solution to any challenge. It will focus on

measurable, proven results – keyed to the measures presented in the attachments to this report – and use that data to support teachers, administrators, the central office, the school board, municipal officials, community and business leaders and families in making sound educational decisions on behalf of Hartford’s students.

Preschool

Research consistently shows the importance of early, continuous, high-quality nurturing and education of young children to their long-term success. Offering a high-quality preschool experience to all who need it is the foundation of a comprehensive approach to closing the achievement gaps. Hartford – with help from the state – must provide high-quality preschool to all of its 3- and 4-year old children. In Hartford in 2003, 44.9 percent of kindergarten students had attended preschool – down from 54.9 percent in 1998 – with a school-by-school range of 15.8 percent to 100 percent (at Breakthrough Magnet). The ERG I average in 2003 was 56.3 percent; the state average was 76.4 percent. Ten Hartford schools exceeded the ERG I average and three schools exceeded the state average. [Please see Attachments 17 and 18.]

It is heartening that Mayor Eddie Perez has announced plans to form a city cabinet for young children. We anticipate a cooperative, supportive and enthusiastic relationship with this group to further the interests of Hartford’s youngest learners.

Family Resource Centers (FRCs)/School-Based Health Centers/School Health Services

The literacy needs of parents – including better adult education programs – can be addressed through family resource centers in every school. The activities of FRCs can be focused to help parents with their own literacy needs so that they, in turn, can better help their children improve *their* literacy. (In Hartford in 2000, 39 percent of all adults did not have a high school diploma.) Parents are, indeed, children’s first and most influential teachers. In Hartford, there are family resource centers in less than one-quarter of the schools (9 of 38) in 2004-05. [Please see Attachment 19.]

Further, families in disadvantaged communities generally face overwhelming health needs for which they often do not have available care. These significant health concerns clearly affect children’s ability to learn. In partnership, the state must help Hartford address the physical (including dental) and psychological health needs of children and their families. Without good health, children simply are not able to learn well. There are 8 school-based health centers in Hartford’s 38 schools in 2004-05, including three high schools. Hartford officials report that all centers are open to all Hartford public school students. However, we must continue to strive for greater availability of school-based health centers and health services for all students. Dental services are more readily accessible (in 18 of 31 elementary and middle schools). In 2003-04, 24 of 37 Hartford schools (65 percent) reported student to school nurse ratios greater than the state average. The student to school nurse ratios at the three traditional high schools were approximately three to four times the state average. [Please see Attachments 19 and 19a.]

Support educators in meeting students' learning needs

Most teachers in ERG I districts put in tremendous effort to help youngsters learn. Teachers in ERG I communities have larger classes, fewer support professionals (from reading specialists to guidance counselors) and, at and above the sixth step on the salary scale, lower pay than their suburban colleagues. This makes it harder for them to teach effectively, harder for their students to learn well, and more tempting for them to move to higher-paying districts. Resources must be found, by Hartford and the state working together, to reduce class sizes where there is a dramatic difference between class sizes in a given school and the state averages. Preliminary data for 2004-05 show that kindergarten class sizes in Hartford range from 10 to 21.6, with an average of 17.8; the state average is 18.4. Forty-one percent of the kindergarten classes in Hartford are larger than the state average. In Grade 2, the Hartford range is 13.8 to 22.7, while the average is 18.7; statewide, the preliminary average is 19.5. Forty-one percent of Hartford Grade 2 classes are above the state average.

The Tennessee Star Research Study demonstrated that smaller class sizes in Grades K-3 (13-17 students) have long-lasting, important effects for high-risk students. These include higher achievement, fewer retentions and greater numbers of graduates. We should monitor class sizes in Hartford so they do not become *significantly* larger than these recommendations and, as part of our partnership, seek creative ways (such as co-teaching) to reduce pupil-teacher ratios to these ranges. [Please see Attachments 20 and 21.]

Further, there must be adequate resources to provide sufficient numbers of support staff members (including reading specialists, psychologists, social workers and guidance counselors) to effect change. It is critical to look at each school's enrollment, the specific support service personnel at the school and the time they spend there, and compare this information across the district to ensure equity of services relative to need. It is also important that, in the aggregate, student support service levels in Hartford are at least comparable to average levels statewide. Given the high level of student need in urban districts, academic and social interventions are crucial, as are the trained professionals who deliver these services. [Please see Attachment 22-23.]

Supporting educators to meet students' needs also means retaining qualified teachers in Hartford who may be inclined to accept positions in other districts as a result of disparities in teacher salary scales. One possibility to consider is to pay 20 percent of staff members at and above the sixth step on the salary scale a \$5,000 bonus, with teachers to be selected based on their demonstrated ability to increase student achievement. According to current contract terms, Hartford teachers at the sixth step earn \$43,597, while Avon teachers earn \$50,014.

Another critical need is for adequate training to help teachers meet the learning needs of all children in their classrooms. All teachers need to be skilled at using common formative assessments embedded in the curriculum as tools for analyzing achievement in order to modify instruction for each child. Also, all teachers need to be skilled in the techniques of differentiated instruction, so that – with the help of bilingual resource teachers, special education instructors, reading resource teachers and others – they can effectively teach the students whose first language is not English and students with disabilities who are assigned to their regular education classrooms. Teachers who are skilled in differentiated instruction are also best able to meet the

needs of regular education students who are working at all levels, including gifted and talented students.

In Hartford, special education concerns extend to the over-identification of students with disabilities and the education of these students in segregated environments. Forty-two percent of Hartford's special education students are educated in classrooms where they are separated from their regular education classmates and 30.8 percent are not educated in their neighborhood schools. Of particular concern is the 68.4 percent of Hartford students with emotional disturbance who are not educated in their neighborhood schools. Both of these situations – the education of students in segregated environments and in schools that are not in their neighborhoods – need to be reversed quickly. And as more students with disabilities are assigned to regular education classrooms, teachers' ability to effectively support their learning will become increasingly critical – particularly in light of the existing outcome data in Hartford. For example, only 3 percent of Hartford's Grade 4 students with disabilities scored at the proficient level on the 2004 Connecticut Mastery Test in reading, while 9 percent of their counterparts in ERG I did and 29 percent statewide did. However, the participation of students with disabilities in the standard administration of the CMT – in all subtests and in all grade levels – increased dramatically from 2003 to 2004. Increases ranged from 20.1 to 29.5 percent. Hartford administrators, content specialists and teachers should carefully examine the differentiated instructional practices and interventions used to address the needs of Hartford students with disabilities. [Please see Attachments 24-27.].

Mentors for new teachers

There is only one job more challenging than that of a new teacher – and that is the job of a new teacher in an urban community. Buildings are often old, class sizes are often large, and students often come to school with a variety of challenges that make it harder for them to learn. In Hartford in 2003-04, for example, 95 percent of all students qualified for free or reduced-price lunches (a measure of poverty), while the state average was 29 percent. Also, 52 percent of Hartford students spoke a language other than English at home (the state average was 13 percent), and only 45 percent of Hartford children attended preschool before entering kindergarten (statewide, the average was 76 percent). The data for Hartford show that 51 percent of Hartford schools (19 of 37 in 2003-04) have a higher percentage of newly assigned teachers compared to the state average. Similarly, 62 percent of Hartford schools (23 of 37 in 2003-04) have a higher percentage of less experienced teachers than the state average. [Please see Attachment 28.]

As a result, we must help Hartford find state and federal resources and rethink staffing patterns in order to assign one master teacher for every 10 new teachers in the system. The master teacher would observe, evaluate and model effective teaching throughout the year, offering one-on-one support unique to the needs of each new teacher in his or her mentorship. This redesign may not be as daunting as it appears; 19.1 percent of Hartford's staff members are already trained as mentors, assessors or cooperating teachers.

School leadership

The role of the principal in transforming a school and sustaining excellence through all the changes that can take place in the life of a school is absolutely critical. A principal can be the catalyst for turning a low-performing school into a high-performing school. At Hartford's Dwight School, a new principal began her assignment in 2000; since then, the percentages of students scoring at or above proficiency on the CMT in reading, mathematics and writing have gone up dramatically. Specifically, these percentages rose from 24 to 56 in reading from 2000 to 2004; from 48 to 79 in mathematics – equal to the state average; and from 39 to 80 in writing – just one point below the state average. Both the Hartford and ERG I averages fell well below those of the Dwight School in 2004. [Please see Attachments 29-31.]

The Dwight School is not the only Hartford School where dramatic and sustained student achievement has been experienced, and everyone involved – dedicated teachers and support staff members, parents and the students themselves – deserve praise for these successes. Often, too, continuity of effective school leadership is a critical factor. What is most important is the *right* leadership for each school – an individual who effectively focuses the attention of all involved (students, parents, teachers, support staff members, administrators and the community) on improving student achievement. [Please see Attachment 32.]

Close the digital divide

Students in Hartford and similar communities are less likely than their suburban counterparts to have computers at home – and if they do, they rarely have access to the Internet. On the other hand, in higher education and in the workplace, regular use of the computer and web resources is an integral part of everyday life. We need to bring this into these classrooms and make it the norm. Not at a 6:1 ratio (six Hartford students for each computer in 2003-04); that's not how it works for university students and businesspeople – although Hartford should be credited for reducing this from 12:1 since 1997. Students need 1:1 computer and Internet access as regular instructional tools – and teachers need to know how to make the best instructional use of both.

One important way in which computers can be used is as a tool in the regular assessment of student skills on a six- to eight-week cycle. Frequent assessment of what students know and are able to do helps teachers adjust their instruction in “rapid-response” fashion, making teaching much more effective and learning much more active and timely. Hartford has experience in using automated assessment programs in reading. However, professional development for teachers in how to develop programs of regular, frequent assessment in all subject areas on the computer can be invaluable. Working together, we need to make this happen, and we should be able to help Superintendent Henry meet his goal to use technology as a learning tool for all students in all grades across all content areas.

A good fit between teachers and schools

Schools are, and should be, different. School leaders have different philosophies which, while working within the philosophy and policies of the local school board, bring uniqueness to the overall program. This is valuable. Some teachers and other staff members are comfortable and effective in schools that operate under particular philosophies; others are not. When they are not, those teachers' effectiveness and that school's effectiveness – and ultimately, the students' achievement – suffer. Each principal must be free to bring into his or her school the teachers and other educators who fit the philosophy of that school and who will work most effectively within it. Is this idea consistent with most union contracts? No. Does it need to become part of the operational reality of the Hartford school district? Yes – absolutely.

Longer school day and year

One of the fundamental ways to improve student achievement is to give students not only better instruction, but more instruction. A longer school day and year would provide students with exposure to a full, rich, comprehensive curriculum across all areas, including the arts, health and physical education, science and social studies – all of which are valuable in themselves and as ways to help students gain basic reading and mathematics skills. In Hartford in 2003, *elementary* school students already experienced more instructional hours in a school year than the state average (1004 versus 984). Still, according to all the evidence (CMT scores, for example), more hours of instruction are needed. *Middle* and *high school* students experienced fewer instructional hours per year than the state averages (middle school – 966 for Hartford and 1014 for the state; high school – 958 for Hartford and 1000 for the state). There, too, the achievement evidence is clear. At a minimum, the instructional hours at the middle and high school levels must rise at least to the state averages. In addition, for all levels (elementary, middle and high school), there must be a close examination of the use of the time students are attending school to ensure that the maximum amount of time is being used for instruction. [Please see Attachment 33.]

Reflections

All that matters is raising student achievement. Success in doing this will require an intense commitment on the part of everyone – students, parents, teachers, support staff members, administrators, the central office staff, the board of education and the community. They must look within themselves and to each other and – with the active help of the state – find the time, energy and resources needed to significantly improve student achievement. They must do so because Hartford is a place where part of Connecticut’s educational underclass exists. But the same joint effort must go into the other communities where the same educational underclass has been allowed to struggle for just as long. Bridgeport, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Waterbury and Windham have a right to expect just as much from state leadership. These seven communities educate 17 percent of Connecticut’s total public school population; Hartford alone accounts for just under 4 percent of the state’s students. We cannot survive as a state if this educational underclass is allowed to continue. It is not morally right and it is not economically feasible.

For the past several years, the relationship between the state and the Hartford Public Schools has been a “living laboratory.” All of us have learned a lot from this work. The data tell us a great deal. We know what we still need to do – and that we must do it *now*.

Recommendations for the SDE – Hartford Public Schools Relationship

- Establish, under new state legislation, a formal partnership between the State Department of Education and the Hartford Public Schools. The partnership should focus solely on improving student achievement and creating the elements necessary to make that happen. This will include redirecting existing resources and finding new resources (city, state, business and philanthropic) to address the areas noted above and other areas critical to Hartford students. The partnership agreement should include specific student achievement targets to be reached over a period of time, with a reasonable schedule of checks on progress. SDE curriculum and instruction staff members would meet quarterly with Hartford staff members to review progress toward student assessment targets. If targets are not met, specific strategies will be suggested, with the expectation that they will be implemented and reviewed. An agreed-upon schedule of professional development offered by SDE staff members to Hartford staff members would be developed and implemented.
- Pass state legislation to allow for flexibility in teacher assignments to schools and programs, length of school day, length of school year, and instituting salary bonuses based on student achievement indicators.
- Pass state legislation providing for significant participation by the Commissioner of Education or her designee in the selection of a new superintendent of schools if that need arises. Participation would be limited to the Commissioner interviewing the finalists for the position and power of veto prior to the local board's vote. In addition, if the local board fails to select a superintendent within a set time limit, the Commissioner would have the authority to select the candidate.

Special Recommendation

This report addresses Hartford, with which the State Department of Education has had a formal relationship for many years. However, the need for action also exists in the six other ERG I communities – Bridgeport, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Waterbury and Windham. Together, the students in these seven communities (a full 17 percent of Connecticut's public school population) represent an educational underclass that is unacceptable in a state that prides itself on the achievement of its students and the high-quality preparation of its workforce.

This recommendation is for passage of state legislation establishing formal partnerships between each of these school systems and the State Department of Education that are similar to the partnership recommended for the Department and the Hartford Public Schools. The formal establishment of a partnership would be triggered by specific achievement levels of a district's students. If the majority of any ERG I town's elementary and/or secondary students perform below the average for ERG I towns, the formal partnership would be formed.

Final Thoughts

The need for better student achievement in Hartford is now. And next year and the next. We can invigorate the relationship between the State Department of Education and the Hartford Public Schools with a partnership that identifies and carries out specific, data-driven, goal-oriented steps that focus on nothing but improved student achievement. We will accept that the checks and balances now in place relative to governance, facilities and audit are adequate to the task, so we can pursue our relentless focus on the specific elements that will improve student achievement.

We can start by looking at Hartford's most successful schools – those that have achieved and sustained student achievement gains despite the so-called odds – and using them as models for schools where achievement lags. And we can work toward longer-term solutions, such as preschool for all, that take more time and resources.

The point is, we can do it – together. But we need to turn up the heat on ourselves now. ***Hartford's students can't wait.***